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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [KMPI](#) [KMCC](#) [KTFN](#) [EFIN](#) [JO](#)
SUBJECT: KING RECALLS PARLIAMENT FOR EXTRAORDINARY SESSION
TO PUSH REFORM LEGISLATION

REF: A) AMMAN 5945 B) AMMAN 5907

Classified By: Ambassador David Hale for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (U) King Abdullah issued a royal decree on August 10 to recall Parliament for an extraordinary session, a move Jordan's political class had been expecting and which GoJ contacts had confirmed was coming. The session, which begins August 13 and is expected to last up to two months, will consider 42 bills supported by the government.

¶2. (SBU) Jordan's constitution provides that the King sets the legislative agenda for extraordinary sessions. The "We are all Jordan" national unity conference of July 26-27 (ref A) set the stage for this special session of parliament and, in the Palace's view, established a national consensus in support of the government's agenda of reform legislation. Among the priority bills parliament will consider are a reformed political parties law, a new municipal government law (which, if passed, should lead to municipal elections throughout Jordan in the coming months), and a counter-terrorism bill. Human rights groups have criticized the terrorism measure, claiming it allows for indefinite detention of suspects.

¶3. (U) Economic legislation on the agenda includes a (long-overdue) improved anti-money laundering law that will enable Jordan to establish a Financial Intelligence Unit that meets international standards. Anti-corruption, tax reform and financial disclosure laws are also on the agenda, as well as a law further tightening procedures for issuing fatwas, and amendments to the Press and Publications Law that will loosen the official press union's control of the profession.

¶4. (SBU) Reform advocates will be watching especially closely the municipal government bill. We expect opponents in parliament to argue in public that a return to Jordan's tradition of fully elected local governments will bring "unqualified" people into government; in private they will argue that Islamists will make big gains.

Potential Diversions: Islamists and Lebanon

¶5. (C) This extraordinary session follows the State Security Court conviction of two Islamic Action Front MPs on charges under of Article 150 of the Jordanian Penal Code for "fueling national discord and inciting sectarianism" when they offered condolences to the family of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. The two MPs are currently appealing their sentences (ref B). Some Front members have called on their parliamentary party to walk out of the extraordinary session in protest. At the same time, with Jordanians of all political persuasions still highly emotional over the violence in Lebanon despite UNSCR 1701, the government may not be able to deny MPs the opportunity to speak from the

floor on these issues. Too much delay could jeopardize the government's highly ambitious agenda.

¶6. (C) Comment: This session will be a "make or break" one for the Bakhit cabinet, which must prove to the king it is able to get an ambitious reform agenda through an anti-reform legislature. The King believes he handed parliamentary support to the Bakhit team on, in his private words, a silver platter by building consensus for that agenda through the "We are all Jordan" conference. Speaker Majali expressed to Ambassador a high degree of confidence that key components of the reform platform will be adopted this summer. In contrast to previous prime ministers, Bakhit can also count on the behind-the-scenes support of the General Intelligence Directorate in twisting the odd legislator's arm (however, he himself does not appear fully briefed on the extent of this support). Other contacts in parliament are less optimistic that the parliament will cooperate with the cabinet, and predict it quickly bogged down in populist debate of the tax reform bill and of the situation in Lebanon. End Comment.

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